

Hobbies

This penny should not have been kept in an envelope

By Roger Boye

More questions from Chicago Tribune readers are answered this week.

Q—Help! My 1909-S VDB Lincoln cent is marred by four black dots, three front and one rear. It's been in an envelope since 1969 and now I'd like to sell. How can I spruce it up? I'm hoping to get \$250.

H.B., Schaumburg

A—Copper coins are virtually impossible to clean. Polishes and other agents will leave telltale shines that reduce the coin's value as a collectible.

You should have placed your rarity in an airtight, inert plastic holder free of moisture. Envelopes rank as one of the worst ways to store copper coins because sulfur in paper speeds the oxidation process. Black "carbon spots" suggest that dust or droplets of moisture—perhaps from your breath—came in contact with the penny.

Q—Is undated paper money stamped "The Japanese Government" worth much? Could I exchange the bills—five pesos and a half rupee—for U.S. currency?

B.T., Chicago

A—During World War II, Japan produced so-called "occupation currency" for many of the countries it invaded, including the Philippines (pesos) and Burma (rupees). Such bills have no value as "legal tender" and most varieties are common among collectors.

Q—I'm told that \$50 and \$100 bills will become worthless after the U.S. government begins making a new type of paper money. Is it too early to start "cashing in"?

J.R., Oak Lawn

A—Despite rumors to the contrary, the government won't devalue current "greenbacks" before the debut of bills featuring enhanced anti-counterfeiting devices. The older notes will be taken out of circulation as they wear out, just as tattered



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money is withdrawn today.

Uncle Sam probably will begin this summer to produce the new \$50 and \$100 Federal Reserve

notes. They will have a clear polyester thread in the paper and microprinting around the center portraits, which should make U.S. currency more difficult to duplicate accurately on color copying machines. Those new features eventually will be added to most lower denomination bills.

Q—What does "gilt" mean in an ad for "gilt medals"? Are such items worth much?

H.S., Chicago

A—The word denotes "gold plated." It takes just a few cents worth of gold to cover even the largest medal.

Q—Why do coins carry mint marks and always on the front side?

B.R., Skokie

A—The marks—such as "D" for Denver—publicize the location of government mints and allow officials to identify where a coin was made in the event of production glitches. Some countries also have placed the initials

of mint masters, designers and engravers on their coinage. For years, mint marks appeared on the reverse side of many U.S. coins but in 1968 the letters were moved to the front.

Q—How can I sell our South African Krugerrands now that it's illegal to own such gold coins?

How does one use the "black market"?

H.N., Oak Park

A—In 1986, Uncle Sam banned the importation of Krugerrands but imposed no sanctions on the buying or selling of such coins already in this country. You can sell your gold "in the open."

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Questions about coins or paper money? Send your queries to Roger Boye, Room 400, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want a personal reply and allow at least three weeks for the answer.